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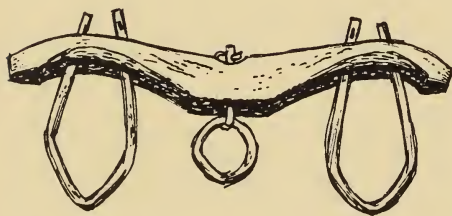
Sherman Day Wakefield.

Abr. Lincoln and the Bixby Letter.

(1948)

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE BIXBY LETTER

By

SHERMAN DAY WAKEFIELD

Author of

"HOW LINCOLN BECAME PRESIDENT"



"The most sublime letter ever penned by the hand of man," is the description given by Henry Watterson to the now famous letter which Abraham Lincoln is said to have written to Mrs. Lydia Bixby of Boston when he was informed that she had lost five sons upon the field of battle. Facsimiles of the "original" of this letter are found in nearly every library, while banks and life insurance companies, even varnish manufacturers, distribute facsimiles as "bait" to the sentimental public. Each year the main postoffice in New York City exhibits a large painted facsimile of the Bixby letter, along with similar facsimiles of other famous letters, during "Write a Letter" week. Every now and then we hear that the "original" is on exhibition at Oxford University in England, or is in the Library of Congress at Washington, or in the Morgan Library at New York, or in the Huntington Library at San Marino, Calif., or in some other important de-

pository. Even optimistic individuals, from time to time, run across the "original" in the attic or some long-forgotten album, and bring the "valuable" paper to dealers for sale. But after investigation, the supposed "original" always turns out to be merely a facsimile. The natural question then arises: where is the original?

The search for the original of the Bixby letter immediately becomes complicated when two or more facsimiles are compared with each other and with examples of the text as printed in various publications dating from a few days after the date of the letter itself. In comparing facsimiles one makes the startling discovery that there are several variations in the handwriting, which makes one suspicious at once as to their genuineness. If facsimiles from a supposed original document do not agree among themselves, which one if any is correct? I have in my possession three facsimiles, no

two of which are exactly alike. Thus it is clear that not all of the facsimiles are from the original, and it remains to be seen if any of them are. Now if we compare the handwriting of any of the facsimiles with the handwriting of genuine Lincoln letters or documents, such as the letter to Fanny McCullough and the original draft of the Gettysburg Address, we find serious discrepancies in the formation of single letters and even entire words between the two. But aside from specific differences in the handwriting of the facsimiles, as compared with Lincoln's known writing, the former look as though they had been written in an unnatural and painful manner, like a child trying to imitate a copy-book style. On their face they bear the marks of being imitations of Lincoln's hand, and any person who studies them will find ample reason for doubting their authenticity.

One more point of internal evidence requires mention, although in itself it is not conclusive. When Lincoln was in the White House he almost never wrote "Executive Mansion" in long hand at the head of his letters, but wrote them on the official stationery such as he used for the McCullough letter and the original draft of the Gettysburg Address. Yet all of the Bixby letter facsimiles bear the long-hand heading. So this fact, along with the other internal evidence, serves to throw considerable doubt on the authenticity of the Bixby letter facsimiles themselves. Now let us turn to their history. Although the letter is dated November 21, 1864, there is no record that either the original or any facsimile was seen

from that day until April 25, 1891, when Michael F. Tobin, a dealer in pictures and prints of New York City, applied to the Librarian of Congress for a copyright on a facsimile. This was entitled "Lincoln's letter," and it contained in the middle of the sheet a large portrait of Lincoln which had been reproduced by the zinc-etching process from a steel-engraving of a Brady portrait, the letter being above and below the picture. The letters of Mr. Tobin to the Register of Copyrights was very short, and did not explain how he happened to have the important Lincoln letter in his possession. He sold a great many of these facsimiles at two dollars each over a period of several years. His reproductions state his copyright was issued in 1892, which is incorrect, but he perhaps first put them on the market in that year.

Shortly after this there appeared on the walls of Huber's Museum on the south side of Fourteenth Street in New York, east of Fourth Avenue, another document which was claimed to be the original of the Bixby letter. This museum was a collection of freaks and fakes of various kinds, and was a strange place to find the original of Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby. This so-called original, however, showed variations in the hand writing from the "original" displayed by Tobin, yet many facsimiles of it were sold to the public at one dollar each. These facsimiles were made from a zinc etching also, but not from the same plate Tobin used. Now it seems strange that, if either Tobin or Huber had the original of the Bixby letter, neither one

Executive Mansion
Washington, Nov 21, 1864

To Mrs Bixby, Boston, Mass,
Dear Madam.

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully
A. Lincoln

THE HUBER FACSIMILE

produced his original in court as proof and prosecuted the other for encroaching on his business under false pretenses. Each was making too much money selling facsimiles not to know the commercial value of the original, and we may be sure that if either had it in his possession it would not now be lost to the world. But Tobin, far from feeling secure in the knowledge that he and only he had the original in his possession, procured on August 1, 1904,

another copyright on his facsimile. This in spite of the fact that his first approved application still had nearly fifteen years to run. The only conclusion that can be reached in this situation is that neither Tobin nor Huber had the original, and each knew it, but that business was too good to stop selling facsimiles.

But why the long period of time between 1864, when the letter was written, to 1891, when Tobin obtained his copyright, be-

fore any facsimiles of the Bixby letter were ever seen? If the letter was of enough interest to have been printed immediately in four papers and a magazine, surely there would have been a demand for facsimiles especially after Lincoln's assassination. Yet the oldest facsimiles in existence are made by the zinc-etching process, rather than by wood-engravings or lithographing as we would expect in 1865. These facts certainly make one doubt the authenticity of the letter, and with the other evidence already adduced makes one wonder if Lincoln had anything to do with it at all. And though more strange complications regarding this letter are still to be cited, there is such a chain of documents in existence leading up to the writing of the letter that we are compelled to believe that such a letter was written. But whether or not Lincoln wrote the letter himself is still another question which we must try to answer.

It was on November 21, 1864, that the letter to Mrs. Bixby was written. It was sent directly to Adjutant General Schouler in Boston, who delivered it in person to Mrs. Bixby on November 25, the day after Thanksgiving. And far from the matter ending at this point, it was just the beginning of a mystery which furnishes wonder to our time. Since the day of its delivery neither the original letter nor an undoubted facsimile of it has been seen, and yet it is perhaps the most sought-after letter in the world.

Apparently Adjutant-General Schouler made a copy of the letter before he delivered it to Mrs. Bixby, for it was he who

gave it to the press. The text of the letter was printed for the first time in the *Boston Transcript* and also the *Boston Traveller* on Friday, November 25, 1864, the day of its delivery to Mrs. Bixby. The following morning it was printed again in the *Boston Advertiser* and in the *Boston Journal*. Its first periodical publication was in the *U. S. Army and Navy Journal* issue of December 3, 1864 (vol. ii, p. 228), and what is apparently its first publication in book form is in Frank Crosby's *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Philadelphia 1865). Yet it seems strange that in the earliest collections of Lincoln's writings, such as the Rev. Edward Everett Hale's compilation *The President's Words* (Boston 1865) and another collection published in the same year entitled *The Martyr's Monument* (New York 1865) the Bixby letter is not found. However, the letter finally found its way into various collections of Lincoln's writings, and at last received the stamp of authority when it was included in his so-called *Complete Works*, edited by his secretaries J. G. Nicolay and John Hay. 2 vols. (N. Y. 1894) vol. ii, p. 600.

Having considered the internal and historical evidence regarding the letter itself, we now come to the historical background of the letter to learn if the war records of the Bixby boys were true as they were presented to President Lincoln. When Adjutant-General Schouler wrote to Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, on September 24, 1864, he made three mistakes about the Bixby boys when he said that one had been killed at Antietam, that each of them had been made a sergeant, and that they had all

been killed. But on October 12th, when he wrote to Major Vincent in Washington. Mr. Schouler modified his original story. Although he still claimed all the boys were dead, he gave other places of death than Antietam and he stated that only one became a sergeant. It is very strange that neither Mr. Schouler in Boston nor persons in the Adjutant-General's office in Washington noticed these discrepancies and investigated the matter more thoroughly. For now we know that the true situation was very different from what had been represented to the authorities in Washington and one which did not deserve a letter from the President of the United States. The facts about the Bixby boys are these:

1. Charles N. Bixby enlisted May 27, 1861, at the age of 20. He was mustered in for three years on July 18, 1861, at Camp Massasoit, and was listed as a Corporal in Company D, 20th Regiment, Mass. Volunteers. He was promoted to sergeant, and was killed at the second battle of Fredericksburg, May 3, 1863.

2. Henry Cromwell Bixby enlisted as a Corporal in Company K, 32nd Regiment, Mass. Volunteers, on August 5, 1862. At the Battle of Gettysburg, July 2, 1863, he was captured and first reported missing and then as killed, but later correctly recorded as captured. He was imprisoned at Richmond July 21 to 25, 1863, paroled at City Point on March 7, 1864, and then at Belle Isle. He was then reported at College Green barracks in Maryland, March 9, 1864; was furloughed on April 16th for 25 days; returned to his regiment on May 6th, and was honorably dis-

charged on December 19, 1864. He may have been in the army hospital at Readville, less than ten miles from Boston, just before his discharge, as an early account says one of the Bixby sons was there, which gave rise to the story that there were six sons—five dead and one wounded. He died at Milford, Mass., on November 8, 1871.

3. Edward Bixby, as Arthur E. Bixby, was sworn in at Camp Kalorama, Washington, D. C., on August 6, 1861, as a Private. He became first a member of Company C, 14th Mass. Infantry, and then of Company C, 1st Mass., Heavy Artillery. He deserted and expatriated himself to escape the penalty of desertion. When he returned from sea, in 1871, he lived for a time with his mother at 74 Pleasant Street, Boston. After his mother died, on October 27, 1878, he left Boston, for in 1880 he was living in Urbana, Ill. In 1907 he was living in Chicago, and on January 4, 1909, he died in that city at 114 West Madison Street.

4. Oliver Cromwell Bixby enlisted at Brookline, Mass., on February 25, 1864. He was mustered in at Readville on March 1, 1864, and received from the State of Massachusetts a \$325.00 bounty besides that which he received from the national government. He had an honorable service, and was killed in action in the Crater fight before Petersburg on July 30, 1864. He was a Private in Company E, 58th Mass. Volunteers. He left his second wife and four children, mentioning in his will only one child by his deceased first wife.

5. George Way Bixby enlisted at Chelsea, Mass., on March 16, 1864, for a period of three years.

as a Private in the 56th Mass. Regiment, Company B. He took the assumed name of George Way, and had probably served before under still another name. He was captured in the Crater fight before Petersburg on July 30, 1864, and deserted to the enemy at Salisbury, N. C. In August, 1879, he was living in Cuba according to the sworn testimony of his brothers and sisters and cousins at that time. He never came back to his deserted wife and mother, and he was not heard from again.

It is now clear that instead of all five of the Bixby boys being killed in battle only two of them met that fate. Of the others, one was honorably discharged and two deserted to the enemy. So if President Lincoln wrote a letter of condolence to Mrs. Bixby it was done under a misapprehension of the true circumstances, some of which were more worthy of condemnation than of commendation.

Did Abraham Lincoln write the letter to Mrs. Bixby? Or was it written for him and he merely signed his name at the end? Is it the kind of letter that he would have written, from what we know of him? Is it written in his style and does it express his views? Let me compare or rather contrast it with a genuine Lincoln letter of condolence. The latter was written to Miss Fanny McCullough, of Bloomington, Illinois, after her father, Lieutenant Colonel William McCullough was killed in battle near Coffeetown, Miss., on December 5, 1862. President Lincoln had known the McCullough family for many years, and he was deeply affected by the tragedy. The letter which he wrote to Miss McCullough,

later Mrs. Frank D. Orme of Washington, D. C., is the most tender and helpful letter of condolence I have ever read:

Executive Mansion,
Washington, December 23, 1862
Dear Fanny:

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad, sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer, and holier sort than you have known before.

Please present my kind regards to your afflicted mother.

Your sincere friend,
A. Lincoln.

Miss Fanny McCullough.

Now style is a difficult thing to describe; it is rather something to be felt, and I do not feel that the Bixby letter and the McCullough letter are in the same category. Of course the former is written to a stranger and the latter to an old friend, which would, I suppose, make some difference. But why would

A. Lincoln

Miss Fanny McCullough
Bloomington
Illinois.

Executive Mansion,

Washington, December 23., 1862

Dear Fanny

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not now realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad sweet feeling in your heart, of a pure, and holier sort than you have known before.

Please present my kindest regards to your afflicted Mother.
Miss Fanny McCullough. Your sincere friend A. Lincoln.

LINCOLN'S LETTER TO FANNY McCULLOUGH

Lincoln, if he believed in a "Heavenly Father," fail to give the consolation of religion to a loved friend in his letter of condolence and then extend it to an utter stranger? That is not like Lincoln, and the comparison only serves to throw further doubt on the genuineness of the Bixby letter. The McCullough letter was written only ten months after the death of Lincoln's dearly loved

son "Willie", which tragedy, it is frequently claimed, turned Lincoln closer to religion than he had been previously. Yet in spite of the nearness of the latest tragedy in his own life and in spite of the interpretation put upon it by many, there is no appeal to God, no reference to immortality, and no religious background in the letter. It is a simple but lofty effort of one human

being to assuage the apparently hopeless grief of another human being by showing that her sorrow will not be endless and that she will again be happy. It could not fail to be of great help to the bereaved, and I consider it to be far superior to the Bixby letter even though the latter should prove to be genuine. It is known that Lincoln was frequently influenced by members of his Cabinet after he became President to insert pious phrases in his public documents, generally for political reasons. We know, for instance, that the original draft of his Gettysburg Address as written by his own hand did not contain the words "under God." It may well be, if he wrote the Bixby letter at all, that "our Heavenly Father" was inserted for the same reason, as such a letter could not fail of great publicity. On the other hand, it might well be that his secretary, John Hay, wrote it and merely presented it to Lincoln for his signature, as has been suggested. The late Rev. William E. Barton, one of Lincoln's biographers, did not think that Hay could have written the letter, but he stated that "from a very high source comes a suggestion that there is an unpublished mystery with respect to this matter." Mr. Barton believed that this statement could refer only to Hay's authorship of the letter. I am inclined to believe it could refer to almost anything in this extraordinary Bixby case. We cannot be sure whether Lincoln wrote the letter to Mrs. Bixby or not, although it appears doubtful, but we can be sure that we have neither the original nor any true facsimile copy of the original and that none of the

current reproductions were made from the original.

If the so-called facsimiles are not true copies of the original Bixby letter, whence came they? Mr. Barton suggested that some unknown person forged the "originals" and sold them to Tobin and Huber in the early eighteen nineties, making variations each time. As there seems to be more than two variant facsimiles now current, the same or some other person must have made more "originals" than the two owned by Tobin and Huber. They were made, of course, for commercial purposes, and if the forger received as much for his "originals" as Tobin and Huber took for their facsimiles he was well paid.

More definite confirmation of John Hay's authorship of the Bixby letter is found in the fact he confided his secret to two outstanding men of his time. The first account was published in London in 1934 and is in a little volume edited by Edward Verrall Lucas called *Post-Bag Diversions*. The book consists of letters written to Mr. Lucas, and among them is one from Rev. Gildart Arthur Jackson, then of South Hampstead, and dated January 16, 1922. It reads as follows:

"When I lived at Knebworth, Cora, Lady Strafford—an American—occupied for a time Knebworth House, Lord Lytton's place, and the late Mr. Page, the American Ambassador, used to spend week-ends there. On one occasion, Lady Strafford told me, he noticed a copy—framed, I think—of Lincoln's letter and asked her if she knew the true history of it. He then related that John Hay had told him that when the news of the mother's bereavement was given to Lin-

coln he instructed Hay to write a suitable reply of condolence. This Hay did, and handed it to Lincoln. Lincoln was so surprised that Hay had so perfectly captured his style of composition that he had the letter exactly as Hay wrote it sent to the mother as coming from himself.

"That is Mr. Page's story to Lady Strafford of Lincoln's famous letter, and I suppose that he was a man who knew what he was talking about; nor do I suppose that Hay was the man to say what was untrue. I feel sure that I have given this as Strafford gave it to me, and as she is still in the land of the living she can corroborate it if the matter interests you sufficiently."

Cora, Lady Strafford, to whom American Ambassador Walter Hines Page told the secret of John Hay's authorship of the Bixby letter, as told to him by John Hay himself, was an American. Born Cora Smith, a daughter of Samuel Smith of New Orleans and later of New York, she was first married to Samuel J. Colgate the philanthropist. After his death she was married in Grace Church, New York, to Henry William John Byng, 4th Earl of Strafford. After the Earl's tragic death she was married to Martyn Thomas Kennard, but she continued to be called Cora, Lady Strafford, a courtesy extended by right of graciousness. She lived in England for many years, where she was well-known and admired in social circles. Although living at the time of Rev. Mr. Jackson's letter she died suddenly October 11, 1932. Walter Hines Page died in 1918, and E. V. Lucas in 1938, and only the Rev. Mr. Jackson is now alive to

verify the story, provided he was not killed by German bombs or died since the late war.

The second account of John Hay confiding his secret to an outstanding man of his time is to be found in the autobiography of Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, the late President of Columbia University, entitled *Across the Busy Years* (vol. ii, 1940, p. 390-93.) Dr. Butler's account reads in part as follows:

"Theodore Roosevelt admired the Bixby letter greatly and had a framed photograph of it in one of the guest rooms at the White House. John Morley occupied this room while the guest of President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904. His attention was attracted to the Bixby letter, of which he had never heard, and he too admired it greatly.

"One morning during his visit to Washington, Morley called on John Hay, then Secretary of State, whose house was on the opposite side of Lafayette Square from the White House. Morley expressed to Hay his great admiration for the Bixby letter, to which Hay listened with a quizical look upon his face. After a brief silence, John Hay told Morley that he had himself written the Bixby letter and that this was the reason why it could not be found among Lincoln's papers and why no original copy of it had ever been forthcoming. Hay asked Morley to treat this information as strictly confidential until after his (Hay's) death. Morley did so, and told me that he had never repeated it to any one until he told it to me during a quiet talk in London at the Athenaeum on July 9, 1912. He then asked me, in my turn, to preserve this confidence of his

until he, Morley, should be no longer living."

John^{*} Morley, of course, was Viscount Morley of Blackburn, the distinguished English statesman and author, who died in 1923.

Now here we have two different accounts published six years apart, one in England and the other in the United States, involving different men and women of unimpeachable veracity, but which agree that John Hay said he was the author of the Bixby letter. If it were possible to doubt one story, it is extremely unlikely that both stories can be dismissed. Therefore, we might as well come to the conclusion that both stories are true and admit that John Hay wrote the Bixby letter.

This does not mean, however, that every question in regard to the Bixby letter has been answered, for in fact these stories have raised some questions which did not exist before their publication. It may be objected that the conversations involved could not be remembered correctly after so many years, but no detailed conversations were reported in either account. Surely such startling information that John Hay wrote the Bixby letter, learned from his own lips, could be remembered by the outstanding people involved. In addition, it is quite likely that public men like Morley and Page kept diaries, as I believe Dr. Butler did for many years.

Further important evidence, however, is found in a letter by John Hay himself to William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law-partner, dated September 5, 1866. This letter is printed in Emanuel Hertz's edition of the Herndon

papers *The Hidden Lincoln* (1938, p. 307) and published in facsimile by Gabriel Wells of New York (1940.) In this letter Hay says of Lincoln: "He wrote very few letters. He did not read one in fifty that he received. At first we tried to bring them to his notice, but at last he gave the whole thing over to me, and signed without reading them the letters I wrote in his name. He wrote perhaps half-a-dozen a week himself—not more." Thus Truth demands we accept the evidence that Hay wrote letters in Lincoln's name while he was Lincoln's secretary.

Now that it would appear to be established that John Hay wrote the Bixby letter, the natural question arises why was Hay so secretive about it in later years. We know he never told members of his own family he was the author of it, although in response to questions he never denied the authorship. Strange as this behavior may seem, I think the explanation is simple. First, as Secretary to the President of the United States, for whom he wrote many letters in the President's name, everything he did was naturally in the strictest confidence. When one of these letters became famous, he was modestly hesitant about proclaiming to the world that he rather than Lincoln wrote it. However, he did feel that in justice to the truth and to himself the fact of his authorship should not be lost to the world, and so he chose to tell at least two outstanding men of his time.

If any more evidence is needed that all of the current facsimiles of the Bixby letter are forgeries, let me quote further from Dr. Butler's book:

He wrote very few letters. He did not read one in fifty that he received. At first we tried to bring them to his notice, but at last he gave the whole thing over to me, and signed without reading them the letters I wrote in his name. He wrote perhaps half-a-dozen a week himself - not more.

Paragraph reproduced from an original letter by John Hay in the collection of Lincolniana formed by W. H. Herndon.

"Not only was Morley's statement to me of outstanding historic interest and importance, but it followed a very interesting talk which I had had with Robert Lincoln concerning the Bixby letter while we were together at Augusta, Georgia, only a few months earlier. Robert Lincoln at that time told me that he had had a proposition from some one who, if I remember correctly, was a saloon-keeper in Brooklyn, New York, to sell him the original of the Bixby letter which had somehow or other come into this saloon-keeper's possession. Lincoln went on to say that he had satisfied himself that the so-called original was a forgery, and that no one had ever been able to find the original letter or knew from

what source knowledge of its existence had been derived . . . Robert Lincoln assured me that the original Bixby letter had never been known to be seen by any other than the person to whom it was addressed, and that all the alleged copies of the letter were merely manufactured facsimiles."

Who the Brooklyn saloon-keeper was apparently is not now known, but he well may have been the forger of the current facsimiles of the Bixby letter. There is no longer any doubt that some man or men forged more than one "original" of this letter and sold them to two individuals in New York who in turn made good profits selling facsimiles to the public. A Brooklyn saloon

is as appropriate a place as any for such a forger, but hardly suitable for the original of the Bixby letter written in the name of Abraham Lincoln.

It has been said that the Bixby letter was a "beautiful blunder." It is reasoned that although it was a mistake and a blunder the letter is a beautiful and unique acquisition to the world. It is my belief that no blunder is beautiful. I feel that the truth is good enough for anyone. If we *must* have a beautiful letter of condolence broadcast, I suggest that the McCullough letter replace the Bixby letter.

Dr. F. Lauriston Bullard, in his book *Abraham Lincoln and the Widow Bixby* (1946), aims to disprove the above thesis set forth in two articles by this writer published in 1939 and 1941 respectively, as well as in the second volume of the autobiography of Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler (1940), and in an article by Mr. David Rankin Barbee (1945). The thesis that Dr. Bullard tries to disprove is that the famous letter of condolence to Mrs. Lydia Bixby of Boston was not written by Abraham Lincoln as is generally supposed but was written by his assistant private secretary, John Hay. Part of the thesis of all three authors was that the "facsimiles" of the Bixby letter, current since 1891, are forgeries. This part of the thesis is accepted by Dr. Bullard (p. viii, 154), and no further argument is necessary on this point. As for the authorship of the letter, Dr. Bullard has to correct various errors and find new facts and arguments before his thesis can be accepted.

Beginning on page 66, Dr. Bullard discusses the quotation from John Hay quoted above. He

quotes the conclusions of Carl Sandburg and William H. Townsend, who independently figured that "there would remain no more letters than Hay says Lincoln himself wrote" (p. 67). This means that a much greater number were written by his secretaries Nicolay and Hay. The fact that Lincoln had two other subordinate or "mailbag" secretaries, who assorted incoming mail, has no bearing on who wrote the Bixby letter. William O. Stoddard, one of them, stated that Lincoln in 1862 "saw and read, at the time of their arrival, about *one in a hundred* [letters]; less rather than more" (p. 70). This further confirms Hay's statement, making it even stronger. It is therefore strange that Dr. Bullard, when supplying these confirmations of Hay's letter, should add: "no argument bearing on the authenticity of the Bixby letter can fairly be based on what his former secretary wrote in 1866" (p. 67).

Beginning on page 73, Dr. Bullard takes exception to a quotation from Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, late President of Columbia University, in his autobiography, as follows: "As a matter of fact, Abraham Lincoln wrote very few letters that bore his signature. John G. Nicolay wrote almost all of those which were official, while John Hay wrote almost all of those which were personal. Hay was able to imitate Lincoln's handwriting and signature in well-nigh perfect fashion." Dr. Butler says he was told this by Lincoln's son, the late Robert T. Lincoln. Dr. Bullard asks (p. 82) how Robert T. Lincoln knew this, as if his father could not tell or write him of it. Even if Hay told the younger Lincoln, as Dr.

Bullard suggests. Hay was a "gentleman" (p. 122) and told the truth. But if Nicolay and Hay did not write most of the letters in Lincoln's name, who did? John Hay said Lincoln wrote only about half a dozen a week, and this has been confirmed by Carl Sandburg and William H. Townsend. Dr. Bullard writes (p. 76): "That Nicolay and Hay wrote some of Lincoln's letters is admitted." But they must have been in the majority, for surely there were many times six letters a week that needed to be written by the President in wartime. This could be the meaning of the words "almost all" as used by Dr. Butler. As for Hay's imitating Lincoln's handwriting, it is not at all essential to Hay's authorship of the Bixby letter to assume or attempt to prove that such was done in this instance. As in these days of typewritten letters, often signed by a secretary in imitation of the boss's signature, so in pre-typewriter days the body of a letter was often written in the handwriting of the secretary, which was signed by the boss and perhaps often imitated by the secretary. Hay would have been the author of the Bixby letter if he had written it in his own handwriting and had it signed by Lincoln or signed it in imitation of Lincoln's signature just as much as if he had written it throughout in imitation of Lincoln's handwriting. However, as Dr. Bullard says (p. 81), "the imitation of an ordinary signature is usually not very difficult. But the imitation of the handwriting in a letter or a document is another thing altogether." Undoubtedly, yet three or more current "facsimiles" of the entire Bixby letter have

fooled the public and Lincoln students for 56 years!

On page 97, Dr. Bullard states the present author "aligns himself with the relatively small group of anti-Lincolnians who accuse the Civil War President of hypocrisy." That emphatically is not the case, and I object to being called "anti-Lincolnian" on any score. The statement was made because I said if Lincoln believed in a "Heavenly Father" he was more likely to "give the consolation of religion to a loved friend [Miss McCullough] in a letter of condolence" than "to an utter stranger" [Mrs. Bixby]. The subject of Lincoln's religion is a complicated one requiring the length of a book for its complete exposition, and no book on the subject has yet done it justice. Hence it is impossible to do justice to it here. However, the highlights are clear. Lincoln definitely was a religious man, but one cannot accurately impute to him any sectarian theological beliefs. He believed in a God, but not in a personal God; rather in a form of deism. Herndon writes (Angle ed., p. 360) that once Lincoln made Herndon erase the word God from a speech which he had written because his language indicated a personal God, whereas Lincoln "insisted no such personality ever existed." Yet the mere mention of "God" did not come easy to Lincoln, even in the most important of documents. For example, there is not one reference to deity in his carefully prepared Cooper Institute Address. Both Hon. John P. Usher and Hon. Salmon P. Chase, members of Lincoln's cabinet, have recorded how Lincoln's draft of the Emancipation Proclamation contained no reference

to deity, and that at the suggestion of Mr. Chase "God" was inserted. In composing the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln apparently wrote it out twice without mention of this nation being "under God," and it was only as he spoke that the words were interpolated, perhaps on the suggestion of Secretary Seward the night before. Later copies of the Address that he wrote contained the words.

It is significant that the great bulk of references to deity occur in Lincoln's political writings and speeches and in his state papers. There are, of course, exceptions. Lincoln was a politician as well as a statesman, and he had no desire to hurt people's feelings or antagonize them unnecessarily when important issues were at stake. Especially in the state papers, like Thanksgiving Proclamations, which may have been written by his private secretaries, the pious references may have been used by them or been suggested by Chase or other members of the Cabinet. Dr. Bullard makes much of the Thanksgiving Proclamations, and invokes Lincoln's signature as giving him the full responsibility for them. That may be true, but as Herndon said in his Lecture on *Lincoln's Religion* (1936, p. 17), "Mr. Lincoln was the President of a Christian people, and he but used their ideas, language, speech and forms. So would Tom Paine have done had he been President of this free people."

Nobody regrets more than I do that Lincoln found it necessary to so play the role of politician as to use pious phrases in his state documents, even though at the suggestion of members of his cabinet. Lincoln's main object as President was to save the Union,

he was willing even to retain slavery if necessary to gain that end, and he needed to have the cooperation of all possible groups including the churches. He could not afford to have the energies of the country diverted from winning the War and saving the Union by religious controversies, so he felt justified in the use of pious words and phrases. The blame, if any, should be laid upon those Christians who make such tactics necessary because they cannot tolerate the right of men in public office to believe differently than they do.

It is my contention that the Bixby letter belongs among the state papers, because it was written to a stranger coming from the President of the United States and because it could not fail of great publicity. As such, it was a political or state document and did not have to be written personally by the President or express his personal views. Even Dr. Bullard writes (p. 62) that Lincoln "wrote as the representative of the nation, the Commander-in-Chief of the Union army."

On pages 99-101, Dr. Bullard cites two addresses and two letters of Lincoln of a personal character supposedly as examples of his use of the phrase "our Heavenly Father." Three of them refer to God, but not as "our Heavenly Father," and the fourth does not even mention God. Then follow (p. 101-105) two documents to the leader of a group of Quakers, Mrs. Eliza P. Gurney, which are almost unique Lincoln papers. Usually presidential responses to official representatives of church organizations or denominations belong among the state papers, but these seem to

include some personal beliefs. With these should be placed the answer of Lincoln to the leader of another Quaker group in 1862, according to Francis F. Browne (*Every-day Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 536-37): "I have neither time nor disposition to enter into discussion with the Friend, and end this occasion by suggesting for her consideration the question, whether, if it be true that the Lord has appointed me to do the work she has indicated, it is not probable that He would have communicated knowledge of the fact to me as well as to her?"

It is not quite clear what Dr. Bullard's object is in the section "John Hay's Burden of Grief" (p. 116-18). He points out that Hay had received word of his brother's death just before he entertained John Morley when, according to Dr. Butler, he told Morley that he wrote the Bixby letter. It would seem that such an occasion would naturally bring up the subject of a famous letter of condolence and lead to the admission as claimed. Nobody claims that Hay in assuming the authorship of the Bixby letter knowingly "was stealing what another man had composed," as Dr. Bullard states. All those who uphold Hay's authorship believe he was honest in making the claim, that he said so because he actually had written the letter. Dr. Bullard says he does not accept any such interpretation, but where does he get the idea that others do?

Dr. Bullard does some round-about maneuvering (p. 118-22) to come to the conclusion that if John Hay had written the Bixby letter and told some others that he had done so, he owed it to his

friend Richard Watson Gilder to have told him. Less than four years before Hay's death, Gilder had sent Hay a copy of a little book called *Lincoln Passages from His Speeches and Letters* (1901), to which Gilder had written the "Introduction" containing the Bixby letter. But Dr. Bullard is on dangerous ground when he argues as follows: "Is it conceivable that if John Hay had been the author of this letter wrongly attributed to Lincoln he would have allowed Gilder to remain for four years in ignorance of the truth, and meantime would have told such less intimate friends as Walter Hines Page, John Morley, and William C. Brownell that he had himself composed this message of condolence which Gilder was extolling as a masterpiece of art?" But do we know that Hay did not tell Gilder? Perhaps Hay lacked the time to read and comment upon the book, perhaps he was not well at the time and the book was mislaid, or perhaps a possible letter he wrote Gilder has been lost. When they met for tea and luncheon in May, 1904, they may have discussed the matter for all we know. Dr. Bullard answers his own question merely by stating: "John Hay was a gentleman." Granted, but Walter Hines Page, John Morley, and Dr. Butler were also gentlemen, who told different stories about John Hay and the Bixby letter. Dr. Bullard's argument is a parallel of that used by me when discussing Lincoln's letter of condolence to his young friend, Miss Fanny McCullough of Bloomington, Ill. I wrote: "Why would Lincoln, if he believed in a 'Heavenly Father,' fail to give the consolation of religion

to a loved friend in his letter of condolence and then extend it to an utter stranger?" (Mrs. Bixby). Dr. Bullard's argument can be explained away easier than can this parallel. Dr. Bullard never answered this question, and it is crucial.

We now come to what Dr. Bullard probably considers his *coup de grace* to those authors who hold that John Hay rather than Lincoln wrote the Bixby letter. On pages 122-28 of his book, Dr. Bullard presents his "scoop," a letter purporting to have been written by John Hay on January 19, 1904, to Hon. William E. Chandler of the Spanish Claims Commission. In his letter Hay is quoted as saying: "The letter of Mr. Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby is genuine, is printed in our edition of his Works, and has been frequently re-published; but the engraved copy of Mr. Lincoln's alleged manuscript, which is extensively sold is, in my opinion, a very ingenious forgery." A facsimile of this letter is printed, not at the front of the volume as stated, but on page 124. This facsimile, however, is not in the handwriting of John Hay, but is a copy made by an unknown person before the original was given to Mr. Chandler's son, W. D. Chandler. Apparently the original has been lost, like the Bixby letter, otherwise Dr. Bullard would have reproduced it. At best, then, the evidence of this letter is third-hand—Hay, unknown copyist, Mr. Chandler—and is not much if any better than the so-called third-hand evidence of the Page and Butler stories. It might even be called fourth-hand by adding the name of Bullard, as Dr. Bullard added the name of Lucas to the Walter

Hines Page story to make that fourth hand. Dr. Bullard quotes Associate Justice Elwin L. Page of the Supreme Court of New Hampshire: "Of course W. E. C. had no motive to copy incorrectly," but just below he admits that the copyist is unknown. However, a motive to copy incorrectly is not necessary—it is as "rare as a day in June" to find a person who can copy or quote correctly. But let us assume that this is a correct copy of a John Hay letter, that he said the Bixby letter is genuine. What did he mean? Dr. Bullard himself (p. 131) gives us the answer: According to Hay, "a letter by a White House clerk and signed by Lincoln is 'genuine.' The clerk may have taken it by dictation, the President may have corrected *a letter written by the clerk*, the President may have outlined or in any other way have drafted a letter and the clerk may have copied it for the President to sign. In any case the signature would make it Lincoln's own. The clerk in any of the alternatives could say, by the way, that he 'wrote' the letter; but when the President appended his signature *even though the letter had been composed entirely by a clerk*, it became a 'genuine' Lincoln letter" (*italics mine*). John Hay was no clerk, he was the official Assistant Private Secretary to the President, and yet Hay believed that a letter written entirely by a clerk and signed by the President would have been a genuine Lincoln letter! Nobody denies that Lincoln signed the letter written to Mrs. Bixby by John Hay, and there is nothing here that militates against Hay's authorship of the Bixby letter. On the contrary, it all but proves

the Hay authorship. Lincoln may have read what Hay had written and affixed his signature, as the Walter Hines Page story relates, or this may have been one of the occasions when Lincoln "gave the whole thing over to me," and "signed without reading them the letters I wrote in his name," as Hay wrote in a letter to Herndon. In either event, Hay could have composed the Bixby letter and it would have been considered by him a "genuine" Lincoln letter.

Finally, Dr. Bullard (p. 134) says that "gifted and versatile though John Hay was, we do not think that the young man, twenty-six years old in 1864, could have written the letter to Mrs. Bixby. He had not suffered enough." On the other hand, Dr. Tyler Dennett, former President of Williams College and Pulitzer prize winner for his biography of John Hay, writes in that book (p. vii): "John Hay was an exceptionally good letter writer; at his best one of the best which America has produced." In a letter to me, dated November 15, 1940, Dr. Dennett added: "Hay was able at that age to write such a letter. Some of his very best letters date from an early period." Dr. Bullard then quotes extracts from letters written by Hay in 1858 and 1860 and from his first published essay in 1861, showing them not up to the Bixby letter style. But during the intervening period up to November 1864, Hay had lived through most of the Civil War and had served as Private Secretary to Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln himself had grown tremendously during those years, and is Hay to be given no credit for having grown

at all? Of course he was not Lincoln, but he had also grown. What is more, none of the documents quoted was a letter of condolence, the writing of which is apt to bring out one's best feeling and words. Dr. Bullard himself quotes a letter of condolence written by Hay to a friend in Massachusetts, dated June 9, 1864, less than six months before the date of the Bixby letter (p. 154). It was not written to cover the same circumstances involved in the Bixby letter, but it seems to have more than a little resemblance to it in ideology and wordage. He said: "I will not intrude upon your sorrow further than to express my deep sympathy for your great loss and my prayer that a merciful God may give you that consolation which mortal love is too weak to offer. I have sent your letter to my mother who will join me in my sympathy and prayers."

Dr. Bullard writes (p. 141-42): "The letter to Mrs. Bixby is universal in its significance, and may ease the pain and uplift the hearts of war-stricken mothers in all generations." Granted, but that does not prove that John Hay did not write it. Then he added: "What is there of timelessness about the President's letter . . . to the young girl who mourned the death of her father?" (the McCullough letter). The obvious answer is that it is "timeless" and "universal in its significance" to all those who have lost their fathers or mothers, and is not limited in its significance to wartime or to those very few individuals who have lost five sons "on the field of battle." In other words, the McCullough letter is much more "timeless" and "universal in its

significance" than is the Bixby letter.

It is well that Dr. Bullard ends his book (p. 143-44) by stating: "We do not claim to have demonstrated absolutely that Abraham Lincoln composed our letter." He has fallen far short of demonstrating to any significant degree that Lincoln wrote it. On the contrary, he has unwittingly supplied additional information which tends further to the belief that John Hay was the author. If the evidence for this belief is not considered overwhelming and convincing, it is only because no first-hand direct evidence is available for either side. What first-hand evidence is available—Hay's letter to Herndon—and the secondary evidence submitted by honorable men, all definitely point to Hay's authorship of the Bixby letter.

Dr. Bullard took occasion in a short article published in the June, 1947, issue of *The Lincoln Herald* to reply to my answer to his book which was published in booklet form in May, 1947, with the title "*Abraham Lincoln and the Widow Bixby*." I answered his reply in the December, 1947, issue of *The Lincoln Herald* and took occasion to straighten out a few misconceptions. I admitted that the Hay letter to Herndon does not prove anything directly as to the authorship of the Bixby letter, but said that it does furnish evidence that Lincoln as president wrote very few letters

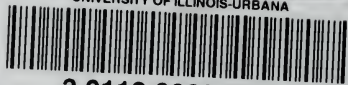
and that Hay wrote many letters in Lincoln's name which Lincoln signed with or without reading. It not only dovetails with the E. V. Lucas story of Hay's authorship of the Bixby letter, but it plays hob with the Bullard theory that Lincoln's signing of letters "made them his own." Of course, Lincoln did write some letters as president; and *a priori* he might have written the letter to Mrs. Bixby, but there is a cumulation of evidence to the contrary at least as strong as the evidence that he did.

In his "reply," Dr. Bullard also referred to Hay's definition of a genuine Lincoln letter. To which I added that because Hay considered a letter written by even a White House clerk, which was signed by Lincoln, as a genuine Lincoln letter, he would naturally include any such in his edition of Lincoln's so-called *Complete Works*. Nicolay and Hay included at least two such letters in their collection, in which the text was written by unknown writers, but were signed by Lincoln, as Dr. Bullard shows in his book (p. 131). This was very likely the situation regarding the Bixby letter, and its mere inclusion by Nicolay and Hay among Lincoln's writings is not in itself proof that Hay knew that Lincoln wrote it. Dr. Bullard and I agree on what Hay meant by "genuine," but he does not seem to realize that it knocks the bottom out from his thesis.



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